

Confirmation of Negative Status Following Brucellosis Scare

Late Thursday evening (January 19th) MDAR received word from the Department of Public Health (DPH) that a dairy farmer from Sheffield Massachusetts had been diagnosed by his physician with Brucellosis. While Brucellosis is a public health issue, it is also considered one of the worst livestock diseases in America. A concerted federal and state effort over the last 50 years has almost eliminated the disease here in the US, but at its zenith in the late 50's it was costing American agriculture more than \$400 million a year. Due to these significant impacts, MDAR continues to administer a brucellosis vaccination service for cattle owners which covers the cost of the vaccine and the veterinarian's time to administer it.

While DPH took the lead on the public health side of this issue, there was a clear animal health role to be played by MDAR. Because the most common pathway of infection for a person is through the consumption of raw milk from an infected cow, MDAR visited the farm on Friday morning both issuing a cease and desist order from the sale of raw milk and a movement restriction for the cattle. The farm is not required to keep, and did not have, a list of raw milk customers so the only way to reach consumers who may have purchased the milk was through public outreach. MDAR strongly encourages dairies that sell raw milk at retail to maintain detailed customer lists to both accelerate the process of issuing a recall and to reduce the necessity for broader communication that could have a negative impact on the dairy market. As a result of the absence of a customer list and in an effort to address the public health threat of possible contaminated milk, MDPH and MDAR felt it was prudent and reasonable to notify the public of the risk while the investigation was under way. That afternoon a joint press conference was held encouraging anyone who had purchased raw milk from the farm to dispose of it, if they consumed it and felt sick, to see their physician and speak to any animal health issues or farm related questions.

At no time was there any risk from pasteurized milk, as pasteurization kills Brucella bacteria.

Labs that are able to test for Brucellosis in milk were unable to run samples over the weekend so MDAR sampled the milk first thing Monday. While awaiting those test results, the Animal Health Division also scheduled a complete herd test (roughly 270 animals) for Tuesday. USDA offered its assistance in performing the tests on the blood samples from each animal provided by MDAR. On Thursday morning, January 26, MDAR received the results of those individual animal tests, which were consistent with the results on the milk - all negative. Also on Thursday, MDAR received word from DPH that further testing by the US Center for Disease Control (CDC) on the human case came back negative for Brucellosis.

There is no reason to believe that anyone who consumed raw milk from this dairy is at risk from Brucella bacteria and MDAR has subsequently lifted the previously issued cease and desist and movement restriction.



MDAR's mission is to ensure the long-term viability of agriculture in Massachusetts. Through its four divisions – Agricultural Conservation & Technical Assistance, Agricultural Markets, Animal Health, and Crop and Pest Services – MDAR strives to support, regulate and enhance the rich diversity of the Commonwealth's agricultural community to promote economically and environmentally sound food safety and animal health measures, and fulfill agriculture's role in energy conservation and production. For more information, visit MDAR's website at mass.gov/agr, and/or follow at twitter.com/agcommishsoares. For our ongoing list of events and workshops, visit and bookmark: www.mass.gov/agr/events/coming_up.htm.